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**Dr. Ernie F. Garcia**

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**Oral History Project of Colton, CA - 12/10/13**

**Dr. Tom Rivera:** Good morning, I'm Dr. Tom Rivera, and I'm one of the members of the unit that started the South Colton oral history project. And the person [who is] responsible for getting us started with this project is Mr. Cesar Caballero; and Cesar is the Associate Vice-President for the library here on campus – and let me introduce to you, Mr. Cesar Caballero.

**Dean Caballero:** Thank you for giving me a better title. Actually, I'm still the Dean but I think I'm gonna show this video to my boss so he can give me a raise and a promotion.

**Dr. Tom Rivera:** And I'll share it with you.  
(Laughter)

**Dean Caballero:** Thank you Dr. Rivera. We're glad to be here at Cal State San Bernardino, at the John L. Pfau Library, Special Collections Department with our guests, Dr. Rivera, who is gonna conduct the interview; and Dr. Ernie Garcia who is the interviewee today. And I just wanna say a little bit about the project before we continue with the interview.

Basically, the intent is for us at this university, at this library, to create an archive of oral history interviews related to Colton, the history of Colton, the communities in Colton, and especially, the people of Colton. So that we can have a historical archive that will become a legacy of sorts for future generations to know where they came from, and to understand the social conditions that exist today, and into the future. So with that said, let me turn it over to Dr. Rivera to conduct the interview.

**Dr. Tom Rivera:** Thank you very much, Cesar, and we truly appreciate all your support that you provide us with this particular project.

Our guest this morning is Dr. Ernest F. Garcia, and Ernie has been part of this university for 23 years. For 23 years where he was the Dean [for] the School of

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Education for 23 years, I said before; and he retired in 1990. And Ernie, it's great to have you aboard. Thank you thank you very much for being with us this morning. To get started, Ernie, in many of your talks that you have presented in the community, you talked about different individuals [who] were born and raised in Colton, and many of them became successful. Would you tell us a little bit about some of these individuals?

**Dr. Garcia:** Yes, and I hope I don't leave any of them out. A former superintendent of schools in the Colton Unified School District remarked to Sonny Ray Abril, who was a long, long time school member, 27-28 years as a school board member in Colton, when Ray told him about some of the people who came from Colton who were in different professions in the area -- the superintendent finally asked Ray: You know it must have been the water that produced such a group of people like that. And we all laughed about that; but the water in Colton is good. So it could have been... that.

**Dr. Tom Rivera:** It was the water... I drank a lot of that water myself...

**Dr. Garcia:** I think [it was] the water, and a lot of nagging Mothers... because we know in studies that the single most important person that successful people in the professions and successful people, period, would often say: It was my Mom, my Mom who pushed me. And so it was with me too.

First of all, I remember as a young person that the people from the South Colton area who were going to Valley College were held in high esteem by all of us. Wow! Joe is going to college... and [we] didn't quite know what that meant but... we held them in high esteem anyway.

Some of the people that I remember from my generation, my group, who responded to advice and nurtured toward higher education was Salvador Flores. Salvador Flores lived there on the corner of 'N' and the Highway 395, which is now called, La Cadena, and to other people, La Cadena. His brother ran a little grocery store there; but, Sal was in my classes in elementary school, in Garfield school, and also at Wilson. He

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went on to get his doctorate in education from University of Oregon, and finished his career as Superintendent of Trenton, New Jersey Schools.

Danny Martinez came about in your generation, 10 years, 13 years later, and Danny was persistent student. He spent more time in the Colton library than anybody I've ever known. [He] majored in math at UCR; [and] ended his career as a professor of mathematics; and, particularly, in statistics where he was nationally known for his work in math and statistics.

Of course, Dr. Tom Rivera, who just introduced me, [is] very successful in his career at Cal State San Bernardino; and also [a] Peace Corps volunteer. [He is] dedicated to his community; and, of course, a shining light for people who have participated in the Future Leaders Program, which he his wife, Lily, initiated some years ago.

Ray Carrion and his brother, Jesus, both got master's degrees. Jesus was known as a counselor at Colton High School for many years, and [he] influenced a lot of people there. Ray went on to become a professor at Fullerton Community College for many years.

Of course, many of us remember Rudolfo Serrano for his work at the University of Texas in political science. I believe it was political science. An interesting thing about Rudolfo, was that he actually centered his work in education. And at one time in the mid 80's, there were 2 Latino deans of schools of education in the system of state universities in California, and Rudolfo and I were the 2 – and we were all from the same barrio in Colton. So that was kind of indicative of some of the things that happened there. His brother, Rudolfo's brother, Tirso, although I don't believe he achieved a doctorate, he was still a very important person in the State Department of Education in Sacramento, particularly, after the [1965] Elementary and Secondary Education Act where he participated in the bilingual programs in direction by the legislation from Sacramento.

The Sosa connection was very important there. Mr. Sosa was a progressive. Some people called him other things, like: socialist, and whatever but, he was a progressive who saw education is a key factor for success of people in the barrio.

The people of South Colton obviously owed him and his family a lot of thanks for the work that he did there.

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Another pair of men from South Colton: from the barrio – this was from the barrio La Paloma right across the street from me, was the Gomez family. Mrs. Gomez was the organist at San Salvador Catholic Church, [she was] a very accomplished musician. Many times I would hear music that was much later, much later in my... ah-man, I remember when she was playing Bach. I didn't know it was Bach then, but, Bach to the future...

(Laughter)

**Dean Caballero:** Can I ask you a follow up question to your latest comment? Besides the possibility of a nagging Mother, in terms of an element that contributed to your professional success, as well as the inordinate, seemingly, inordinate number of peers who also succeeded beyond what a lot of us might say: expectations from the barrio, from Colton – what would you say are other elements? What was part of the culture that motivated you—that was the driving force behind your success?

**Dr. Garcia:** You-know, I think part of it was due to the fact of segregation that occurred there. We were segregated south of the tracks, or south of Highway 99, [which is] now [Interstate] 10... And so there was a lot of interaction among people; and the fact that the WPA (Works Public Administration) came in to assist schools in the early to mid-30's. People remember that so many artists, writers, [and] musicians were out of work during the depression. And one of the programs of the government became an assistance for those folks to write materials, historical materials for the schools; and you as a person involved with libraries know that the YWCA produced volumes of beautiful, beautiful literature that were used in schools.

In Colton, the musicians in Colton, particularly, Emilio Delgadillo, who was a musician, was brought into Garfield School, and then later to Wilson Junior High School to lead conjuntos: guitars, an orchestra, a band. And here was a person from the barrio being utilized by the federal government to teach music to students. So there was that part of that education, and then writers who also were there. I remember very specifically, storytellers coming to Garfield School to tell stories. The very first time that I ever heard opera was performed by the Wilson Junior High School music students that had

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been influenced by this movement. And, this guy who everybody knew as Chito Dela Rosa – he was into everything... and Chito sang the lead in a portion of “Carmen.” And we heard the music and we were told about opera. Now, I was in elementary school and I was impressed. Those elements of culture, and help... if I had right here my copy of the 1938 year book for Wilson Junior High, you would be very impressed with a number of organizations [and] clubs in that school in its first year and a half of existence. It had a band, a marching band; and the principal of the school was a young man in his 20's who played the saxophone; and he marched along with the kids. And many of the other people who would be recognized by former musicians in South Colton, would say: Wow! You-know this was really a great thing... and other musical groups... I counted 16 clubs that were part of the junior high. So there was an interaction of all kinds of organizational features, music, vocational clubs, the glee club, the boys cooking club – come on! In those days a boys cooking club? And so, I think those influences were there. Then, there were some pioneers: one of the pioneers, I can happily say, was my oldest sister. She graduated from Colton High in 1940; and through connections with a teacher who had friends in Beverly Hills—and needed a Nanny, and whatever, she ended up in Beverly Hills from South Colton to Beverly Hills to be a Nanny and attend UCLA.

**Dr. Tom Rivera:** Is this Hilda?

**Dr. Garcia:** It's Hilda.

**Dean Caballero:** Would you say that she became kind of a role model?

**Dr. Garcia:** Oh yeah, yeah. She would come home – we had a free pass on the Southern Pacific Railroad because in those days any worker who worked with the Southern Pacific, even in the lowest level of work, had a pass for the whole family anywhere that Southern Pacific went.

**Dean Caballero:** How nice.

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**Dr. Garcia:** It was a great perk. Many of the families could not take advantage of that perk. One person who did was my Mother, so we went to Mexico every other year free on the Southern Pacific Railroad, which had a sucursal (branch office) in Mexico. So... Bertha Carlos lived on 'L' Street... 3 houses over from the Catholic church; she graduated from Colton High I think a year after my sister and she became a very, very successful lawyer in Sedona, Arizona. Now, she did not come back to the community enough... that I remember; anyway, she might have but I don't remember. But those, particularly, for young women... to pick up from the barrio and go to the big city was unheard of. So I think some of those factors were important.

**Dr. Tom Rivera:** Some of the main factors you mentioned, Ernie, was the fact that we were isolated from the other side of Colton. And that kind of promoted some of the activities that you mentioned in terms of being self-sufficient, having our own grocery stores, our own churches, our own restaurants, and our own schools. [This] created a sense of security in terms of being in the same area where we were all protected. Along with some of those activities that were provided by the US Government.

**Dr. Garcia:** Absolutely.

**Dr. Tom Rivera:** Before we leave those individuals, Ernie, that you mentioned were successful, tell us about your cousin, the pilot?

**Dr. Garcia:** Well, everybody thought he was my cousin. We served in the Air Air National Guard and then, both of us joined because we didn't want to go to the occupation forces in either Europe or Asia. After World War II we were in Colton High School in the 40's...

Gil Garcia came from Jerome, Arizona when the copper mines there closed in the early 40's. We became very, very good friends and everyone who knew us thought that we were either brothers or cousins. But, an interesting thing, when we were both in the Air Force, the sergeant would come out and call, read the roster and call for attendance and so they would get to me [because] of course, 'E' Garcia, and he was

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‘G’ Garcia, I came first and so they would yell my name and I would yell “Yo”, and then the person calling the name would say, “again”, and he was known as ‘again’.

(Laughter)

**Dr. Garcia:** To this day we still laugh about it...

He stayed in the Air National Guard after we got back [or] he got back in June of 1952; I got back a couple of months earlier. For what reason, I don’t know – we both signed up at the same time. He stayed in the Air National Guard and went into fighter pilot training. And he came back still in the Air National Guard in air support through the Air National Guard to our defense system here. He retired in... I don’t remember exactly when but he was a lieutenant colonel and gained that rank after we got back from the Korean War.

**Dr. Tom Rivera:** All these years I’ve been under the illusion that he was your cousin?

**Dr. Garcia:** Yes. I’ll tell him – he will be very proud of you.

**Dr. Tom Rivera:** Yeah, please.

(Laughter)

**Dr. Tom Rivera:** Ernie, you mentioned that... I keep telling people that you were born and raised in Colton. Now, is that like the story of your cousin or were you born and raised in Colton?

**Dr. Garcia:** Yes, I was definitely born in Colton at 338 South 10<sup>th</sup> Street, just south of ‘M’. Dr. Sayers came to the house and delivered me. In fact, Dr. Sayers... you’d be interested in this – when you look at your Kiwanis division 36, look at the pictures of lieutenant governors in division 6, which was the predecessor we split later on. Look at Dr. Sayers and his picture’s there, and he’s probably frowning because just delivered me.

(Laughter)



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**Dr. Garcia:** I was the youngest survivor of the 8 children in our family. 2 of them, the eldest died before my father and Mother left Sinaloa to come north [and] that was in 1918. And there were twins and they died of influenza of [the] 1918 worldwide flu.

**Dean Caballero:** It was an epidemic...

**Dr. Garcia:** Yes, an epidemic... Then, they came [and] settled in Colton just around 1920, with a stop in Yuma. And so the 4 of us survived because 2 of them died in infancy in Colton. I was the youngest, Hilda was the eldest, so we had 2 others in between.

**Dr. Tom Rivera:** And Mom and Dad coming to Colton, did Dad [get a job right away] either for the railroad or the cement plant?

**Dr. Garcia:** No, my folks, when they came across the border... You need to know this because you were surprised, somewhat, by part of my background. When they came across the border, my Mom was pregnant with my eldest sister, Hilda. And when they came across the border, some Methodist missionaries were there greeting the people coming through and providing food and some lodging... [They were] very helpful to the immigrants here. Of course, that was one of those other times when demand for labor was quite high. So it was not difficult to get the visas to come across with... proper documents. So they were befriended by these Methodist ministers, and this impressed my father a lot because he always wanted to be a pretty smart guy. [He was] well educated but not schooled. I remember, just as a digression here, I remember when all of the situations in Africa were occurring when the colonists were being aced out and new African countries are being developed. And then one day I was sitting with him on the porch there at 'O' Street, just on the street from where you came from, and we were talking about that and he said to me: You-know I don't understand this, when you look at Africa, and he had a map there and he showed where Nigeria, Liberia... some of those countries are – he said, the countries are vertical that they're developing – this is a new country here, and this is a new country here. He said, but what bothers me is

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that the ethnicity, the tribal parts of that are this way (he motions with his hands horizontally). So that a country is going to have 3 tribes, one of them was [near] the sea, one in the middle, and one much farther north. I was in college at the time, [and] I said, man! This guy is smart, got smarter all the time I was gone... So anyway, I got away from the question you asked me, but I do that very well.

**Dr. Tom Rivera:** Well I'm glad that you said that...

**Dr. Garcia:** They came from Sinaloa [and] settled in Colton in right around or between 1919 and 1920. That was after a lot of things had happened there in South Colton that had disappeared by the mid 20's, or so. It was a gentleman there who built the bullring in South Colton, [and] had a huge swimming pool close to the Aqua Mansa area.

**Dr. Tom Rivera:** Caldera...

**Dr. Garcia:** Juan Caldera, he had an apartment, a two-story building on the corner of Congress and 7<sup>th</sup>, [he] had a meeting hall 7th Street, [and] he was quite an important character; but he sort of... Well I know when he passed away some of the other folks might have that date... but I think it was in the late 30's maybe early 40's. But [he was] very instrumental in developing things along 7<sup>th</sup> Street, which as you said, it was pretty self-sufficient except for the clothing stores. North of the tracks there were 3 department stores: JC Penney, Willits, and Hellmann's. The choice of South Colton was Hellmann's. Later on, much, much later on after I retired I played golf a couple of times with old man Hellmann, who was almost 90 – there at Arrowhead Country Club. And I'd joke with him about the fact that he had credit and running accounts with people – that's where we shopped. Whenever I went to a department store with my Mother, 4 blocks north of where we lived, we went to Hellmann's.

**Dr. Tom Rivera:** Earlier you mentioned Juan Caldera, and you mentioned the projects that he had in South Colton because not being able to utilize the playground in North Colton's swimming pool, Mr. Caldera went ahead and built a baseball diamond, he

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went ahead and built a swimming pool, and he went ahead and built a bullring, also, and he also had a dance hall in that area.

**Dr. Garcia:** I don't know about the dance hall; I know about the bullring because [what was] interesting about that, of course, we didn't have all the regulations or the things about animals that were present then. But even then, they couldn't kill the bull; and so Aqua Mansa had a Portuguese colony that succeeded the New Mexican people who came there in the mid 1800's. And [they had] 1 or 2 dairies in the area but, of course, they were really happy because Portuguese bullfighting you don't kill the bull. So they fit right in; but I don't know about that because I wasn't even in anybody's imagination...

**Dean Caballero:** Do you remember where it was located?

**Dr. Garcia:** Yeah. If you go to Colton, South Colton, take La Cadena to 'N' Street, turn right on 'N' Street and [go] under the railroad underpass, [and] when you get to 5<sup>th</sup> Street hang a left and go south on 5<sup>th</sup> Street... there's a 3-way thing. To the left you don't want to go 'cause you'll hit the old highway. You can get out of there, there's an outlet if you wanna go see the girly show you can go there. But you don't wanna go there.

(Laughter)

**Dr. Garcia:** If you go straight ahead it dead-ends, but to the right it swings around and [there's] a new San Salvador Elementary School, and it's the Preschool now – go a little farther and you'll hit Rancho and if you go just left on Rancho that whole area... there was the general location... It was in that area in the southern part of the town.

**Dean Caballero:** I'm gonna have to run to my next appointment, but it was a pleasure to have been here for the beginning of your interview... Thank you...

**Dr. Garcia:** My father, when you asked me about where he came to work, he came to work at the cement plant in 1920. He started working there... His job security wasn't

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very good there because he'd been there, I think, 2 years when he and several others of his co-workers, [which] most of the laborers there were Mexicans – [they] protested that 4<sup>th</sup> of July was celebrated and everybody had a holiday. [So they said], hey, what's wrong with 16<sup>th</sup> of September? Since that's when most of us they said would celebrate. But management, of course, wasn't going to let them go and celebrate the 16<sup>th</sup> of September. So they decided that they would not show up for work. So my father was instrumental in this whole thing, and he stayed home and so did his friends; and everybody else went to work. So he was the only one after they had agreed they weren't gonna work. So they canned him – and he was out of work for a few... I don't know how long, not very long; and he got a job at Pacific Fruit Express, the icing company for Southern Pacific ice cars where they ice the two ends of the box car so that the middle part would be cold for the fruits and vegetables being shipped from California, or received by California to be shipped up north.

So he retired from there at age 65; he was a repairman, a maintenance worker after his years as an ice-man, you might say.

What was really interesting is that I used to spend a lot of time there at the plant when I took his lunch, particularly, on weekends when he worked those days. I would go into the ice room and I would see the three hundred pound cakes of ice coming from the freezer where they were frozen—down a shoot. And these 2 guys would, one on that side and one on this side, would hook the front part of the ice and stand [it] up, all with motion. You-know if you tried to pick that up, just dead weight, it would be very difficult. But I was so impressed – that's as an aside because that really impressed a kid watching these guys pick up ice like that. It went out the shoot and then as it went out the people breaking it up would break it up into fourths, and then down the middle again so that the blocks were about this size (he motions with his hands). And then they iced each end of a boxcar, and it was intense work. So he worked there for a long time.

**Dr. Tom Rivera:** You mentioned, Ernie, when we talked about people living in South Colton... you mentioned your Dad working for the cement plant, [and] that was pretty

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close to the house, and you mentioned working for PFE, and that was also pretty close to the house...

**Dr. Garcia:** Much closer, yeah...

**Dr. Tom Rivera:** Yes. And then we had the other industry which was citrus. So I think the foundation for the economic situation in South Colton was, like you described it before, *el cemento, el trache, las minas, y la volucha*...

**Dr. Garcia:** *El trache, las minas, y la pisca, y la volucha*... but there were other *piscas* too besides *volucha* – yeah, yeah, that was a big one...

And *las minas*, of course... also covered a lot of the Mexican population that came into Arizona, particularly. [There was] a lot of copper there and other mines, but here it was Hemet, Crestmore, Colton, Oro Grande... those were the biggies.

**Dr. Tom Rivera:** Yep, right—right. And the railroad, of course, like you said, Southern Pacific going all the way to Mexico and signing up workers to come back to El Paso, and then to Los Angeles, and then to our area.

**Dr. Garcia:** Absolutely. It was quite an interesting progression from the people coming across the border in Nogales – that was the closest border entry. Of course, there was one in Tijuana but because the railroad came directly through Nogales it was easier to come through there.

**Dr. Tom Rivera:** I know my Grandfather worked for the PFE, and he came from Santa Maria, de Los Angeles, and Jalisco – and the railroad got that far and brought him here to work for the PFE.

**Dr. Garcia:** Now did [he] work for their repair company or the ice company?

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**Dr. Tom Rivera:** I think he worked for both because PFE opened up in 1907 and that's when he started working for them. But before that, he was in Colton in 1905, and that's when he worked for the repair company. But he was in Los Angeles in 1899...

**Dr. Garcia:** The book by a professor named Ruiz, a professor at University of California, San Diego (UCSD), passed away a couple of years ago – [he] mentions that era [in his book]. It was very interesting [about] immigration from the late 1890's before the Revolution in Mexico when things were rumbling. One of my uncles came to work in the mines in 1901 in Arizona, and when he went back to Sinaloa with his stories of having plenty to eat and having shelter and being able to save a few dollars—really interested a lot of folks down there. Many of them didn't have the resources to come north; so those who came at that time were really fortunate.

**Dr. Tom Rivera:** Yes, they were. And I think the myth still continues, Ernie, that the idea that you could make it here—and it would be a much better place to live...

**Dr. Garcia:** That's the testament to a lot of things that have happened...

**Dr. Tom Rivera:** Ernie you mentioned that you were born and raised in Colton, and you went to school at Garfield Elementary School?

**Dr. Garcia:** Yes, remember Garfield was on 7<sup>th</sup> Street. I don't know when it was built, but it was pretty old when I was there.

**Dr. Tom Rivera:** They mentioned 1926...

**Dr. Garcia:** We couldn't start school because there was no kindergarten in those days. So I didn't start 1<sup>st</sup> grade until I was 7... I was an old guy by the time I got out of high school. In fact, the month after I got out of high school I turned 19. So I was an old guy...

(Laughter)

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**Dr. Garcia:** But Garfield was a good experience; and, of course, one of the things that was exciting to me, really exciting, was when Wilson was being built.

**Dr. Tom Rivera:** That was 1938, '39?

**Dr. Garcia:** No, it was before that... '37... The big class was in '38. 1936, '37 my father would... they used to work on Saturdays with the construction of it – and I'd go watch. And I could tell you that the rebar in those walls at Wilson is about that far apart (he puts 2 fingers up to show how far apart)... That place will never fall down, it was very well built. And remember, it was facing the old 395 that turned there left on (inaudible) with a little curve and went in front of Wilson.

**Dr. Tom Rivera:** Yes.

**Dr. Garcia:** ...Down where the Pago Pago was, and then the turn to the right and under the little underpass back there. So here was Garfield and then Wilson being built on the other side; and I watched a lot of that construction... [I was] very, very interested in it.

The political part of that construction is very much connected with the Alessandro School in San Bernardino. Alessandro was also a junior high for years, probably equal in length for the sixteen years of life for Wilson Junior High. When the government, under Franklin Roosevelt, and the WPA began to hire people to work on public projects [in the] schools there, we were still segregated. And there was still that heavy, heavy prejudice among some of the populations both in San Bernardino and Colton. And Ruth Tuck makes that very clear when she talked about what was happening in the surrounding cities...

**Dr. Tom Rivera:** Who is Ruth Tuck?

**Dr. Garcia:** Ruth Tuck was a sociologist, anthropologist; although [the] University of Redlands didn't have an anthropology major in those days – much of her work is in

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anthropology. She wrote about San Bernardino in the late, early 40's, very early 40's, late 30's maybe. She wrote a book called "Not With The Fist" – and the book is the result of her master thesis at Redlands. And she did a lot of study about the prejudice situations and apartheid situations in San Bernardino, Redlands, and Colton; [but] mostly, San Bernardino. But one of the things that she mentions very clearly is that Alessandro was built for a reason. There were 3 other junior high schools in San Bernardino: Arrowview, Sturges, and Richardson.

Sturges had some Mexican-Americans/Latinos going across the tracks to Sturges...

**Dr. Tom Rivera:** And that was downtown San Bernardino...

**Dr. Garcia:** When there were good football players like our friend, Hiram Diaz, [who] was selected to go there because 9<sup>th</sup> grade football was very big in those days. Very few Latinos/Mexican-Americans went to Arrowview, very few, unless they were sons or daughters of the counsel, or something... it was very segregated.

So one of the ways to have folks stay in their area is to say, well, they're happy, they're happy with their own kind: ergo, Alessandro and Wilson.

Before that, 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> graders would go to Roosevelt, across [or] by Colton High School, which is a junior high. My oldest sister went to Roosevelt; but then, in 1938... keep them down there – another part of segregation.

I remember Wilson... when I was at Wilson, I don't remember anybody who was not Mexican-American – no one. Later on, of course, 10, 12 years ago when the school district decided to bring the Grand Terrace kids down to Wilson – it cost them some angst.

**Dr. Tom Rivera:** Ernie, even though we had some population on Jefferson, just south of Wilson and Garfield, [and although there was] a large population of Anglo residents – we still didn't have them at our schools?

**Dr. Garcia:** No. One of the things that I remember very vividly was the big yellow school bus coming down 7<sup>th</sup> Street to Congress, hanging a right and there was a



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settlement all in there of employees of the Gas Company. There was natural gas distribution [with] big tanks there in that corner. And then on Congress where it crossed the old highway, which continued to be 8<sup>th</sup> Street, there were some families there, and a couple of others within walking distance of Garfield but they didn't go to Garfield. The bus picked them up and went in front of Garfield all the way to Lincoln. And so, those things were very evident – and in those days as a 7 year old, 8 year old – I didn't look and say, wow, you-know... that's prejudice, or whatever. I just thought maybe it was people are paying to get their kids over... so they wouldn't have to walk the 1 block.

**Dr. Tom Rivera:** What are some of your experiences at Colton High School? Did you play any sports, or were you in a band?

**Dr. Garcia:** My experience at Colton High School was better, probably, than many of my peers. But I must tell you, not many of us went to Colton from Wilson. I think it was 72 in my 8<sup>th</sup> grade class... In those days we were 8 – 1s, 8 – 2s, 8 – 3s, and 8 – 4s, or whatever, [because] we were tracked. That was in 1944.

I believe, out of the 72, I believe 18 of us went on to high school. Now, the reasons: I remember the twins, the Flores twins, who were friends of mine – we were older as I said, I started 1<sup>st</sup> grade at 7 years of age [and] others started when they were 8. So a lot of these fellows, and not so much the girls because employment for women in industry, of course, was very... until the war it got really going. And you were close to being where “Rosie the Riveter” was. The fellows were hired by Kaiser at age 15... 14, 15 [around] there. A lot of jobs were available during that part of the war. And so, that was one part of it; the other part of it, *no te vas a casar*... about 18 of us from Wilson to Colton High.

I was a musician by that time; I played in little *conjuntos* there in South Colton.

South Colton was very interesting, there were almost... any Sunday in, say, 1941, 42 right in there – any Sunday that you went around there was a jam session going on somewhere. And, of course, then in the following 2 or 3 months it was no longer a jam

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session with the same guys because they had been drafted, or whatever. And so, it was – I could say, it was a barrio musical thing around there... [with] a lot of musicians. So when I went to Colton High, I got in a band that played in the orchestra; and also I became a pretty skilled track person and in cross country. So sports are one way that things get integrated better, and if you're successful in sports, unfortunately, it shouldn't be that way but that's the way it was. My friend, Gabby, whom you mentioned, [was] one of the smartest people I've ever known, he was a brilliant young man. So he got involved with the newspaper reporting, [and he] was in all those kinds of literary activities, and also a successful athlete. So my time (inaudible) in high school was not one where I felt out of place, except for the very first time that in my English class, as a freshman, the teacher came up with one of the those very inventive kinds of opening sessions: What did you do last Summer? So, hey, I did a lot of stuff – really, awe we went here... come-on, *la pisca* is where I was – so I was traveling.

**Dr. Tom Rivera:** You were camping.

**Dr. Garcia:** Camping, yeah, camping in Hemet picking apricots. But she asked us to speak, and then Bennie Alvarez, I don't remember if you knew—remember Bennie...

**Dr. Tom Rivera:** Yes, yes...

**Dr. Garcia:** Bennie, and Irma Sosa, and Connie Beltran and Dave Beltran, and I were in this college prep [program] with all the other kids there from Roosevelt. And, of course, I got up to speak – I didn't know I had an accent until she called me first and I got up and started speaking and everybody laughed. So that was an indicator, and Bennie was worse, so I laughed at Bennie.

**Dr. Tom Rivera:** Now, of the 18 people that started high school, how many of them graduated, that you know of?

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**Dr. Garcia:** I would say, 12, 13 maybe. And in those days, the speakers for graduation were not particularly always grade-wise. It was an important factor but it wasn't a grade point average that said you were a valedictorian... they just selected 4 people. And the 'suits' were very much involved with that selection – so I was selected to speak at my graduation, among 3 other people; and so was Gil Garcia that following year.

**Dr. Tom Rivera:** Your cousin...

(Laughter)

**Dr. Garcia:** My cousin, yeah...

One of the things that we didn't talk about was how impressed I was as a kid with 7<sup>th</sup> Street? The guys who wrote the book... they mentioned the bars and they were very active there.

**Dr. Tom Rivera:** They refer 7<sup>th</sup> Street to the Broadway of South Colton.

(Laughter)

**Dr. Garcia:** Yeah, if you compare it to a very small village someplace; but it was an important thing for us. And probably the most important thing that I remember, anyway, Tom, it was a good mechanic there who could take care of your car, and knew all of this stuff; 3 barber shops, and Martinez Bakery; and then, of course, right on the corner [was] the general store on 'M'...

**Dr. Tom Rivera:** Cervantes?

**Dr. Garcia:** Cervantes... The brother that we [knew] as Butch because he was a butcher there, Cervantes had this huge side of meat service – so it was very impressive there. Then later on, in the 40's Brill established his shoe store right across from Cervantes and Aguilera's business. But to me it was when my Mom sent me with my 15 cents to get a haircut, and send me on Saturday mornings to get *samitas*. They

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were nice and hot... (inaudible) Martinez Bakery... But you had to be very, very, very careful crossing the street there because that was the major highway between 395. And sometimes when the trains were going through, the traffic would be backed up all the way there going north. And of course, south was empty because they were backed up on the other side of town. But I was always impressed with the fiestas that were held there: the *Fiestas Patrias* in the park – [and] what is now the parking lot of the Sombrero. And then, on the corner across from 'N' Street and La Cadena there's now a little store there, and many other activities...

**Dr. Tom Rivera:** And the church was also – kind of on 7<sup>th</sup> Street, on 'L' and 7<sup>th</sup>. San Salvador was there... And then you had Rodriguez Market, also... On the corner of 'O' and 7<sup>th</sup> that was the other market.

**Dr. Garcia:** Aguilera had a market on 'N' Street and then, of course, Rodriguez... In 1943, 42-43 when the *braceros* starting coming in, it created a new industry in South Colton. Some of it was very healthy, some of it was not so... because entrepreneurs took advantage of the workers coming in to work. It's like, it reminded me of a company store where people worked for the railroad and there was a store that was owned by the railroad and so they could go buy a lot of stuff, but a lot of the times they would exhaust all their coming pay – just in that store... One of the things we didn't mention that was very important was the railroads had section houses. And the section houses had the families of the workers who maintained a section of the railroad.

**Dr. Tom Rivera:** Now, where were they located?

**Dr. Garcia:** In Colton, the section [housing] for the Southern Pacific was located... if you go down Mt. Vernon and cross Valley Blvd. going south... and then, you turn to go up Mt. Vernon into the new development in the Cooley area, right in that angle...

**Dr. Tom Rivera:** Where 'M' and Mt. Vernon meet, in that area?

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**Dr. Garcia:** More like where 'I' or Valley Blvd. and Mt. Vernon met, right in that corner. But a little south of that... if you go down Mt. Vernon you hit the stop sign for Valley and then, as you proceed you have to turn left a little bit onto the on ramp for the freeway – right in that area...

**Dr. Tom Rivera:** Right in that area...

**Dr. Garcia:** Paul Moodle and Ray Robles, who were from a blended family, lived there for a while.

**Dr. Tom Rivera:** ...I remember my grandparents talking about... and my aunt living there when they first came to Colton.

**Dr. Garcia:** If he was employed by the railroad that's where they lived. This was strictly a railroad operation; and we called it *La Sección* – the section – and they took care of a section, wherever it was. If it was from there to wherever in Redlands or beyond, and then west... whatever, I don't remember the boundaries of the responsibilities. But they took care of the railroad—making sure the spikes were still in there...

**Dr. Tom Rivera:** And then also, Ernie, you said that a lot of workers that worked in the PFE, and also Southern Pacific, these companies would break up their boxcars and then dump the wood across the street, and then, many of our families would go down and collect that wood and build our houses with that wood...

**Dr. Garcia:** Absolutely, and today if you go through to La Paloma, particularly, because that was close to the origin of the stuff... You'd still find a fence or a side of a house and you can see the tongue and groove boards that were taken off the boxcars. Definitely, yes, yes... we built our fence all along the alley of 10th Street between 10<sup>th</sup> Street and 11<sup>th</sup> Street – that was from boards from there... and you had to be real quick because they burned them everyday.

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Now, I want to tell you about my entrepreneur jobs in those days. Junk metal was very, very much in demand in the very late 30's – the Japanese were buying everything – then they shot at us... you-know, they shot it back at us during the war. But anyway, the junkman came to South Colton in his truck every 2 weeks. One of the things I did... I was a *dompero*... and I have to admit it, today. I would get up real early with my little cart that had a metal pan in it, a left over wheel barrel pan, and I would pull it down the alley 2 and a half blocks, down into the wash, which was not the Santa Ana it was a Lytle Creek branch that ran there – next to that big *nopalera*... the nopal-seeds used to grow along there... And over to the fire where they had set all the wood on fire and, of course, what was left were all these glowing straps, and bolts, and nuts, and angle irons, and everything. And I had a big pole with a hook, and then also, I had one with a can and I would dip them in there and get the stuff. 4:30, 5 in the morning, and most of the time my Mother didn't even know I was gone, and my Dad didn't know I was gone. And I also think, what if I had slipped and fell in there, they never would have found the bones... Anyway, there were a couple of other people that would show up that early, although, not too many. And I would bring my junk home and keep it for a couple weeks. And some of the guys that went to the other dump at the end of 'O' Street – remember that was way...? And [they] got metal from there [because] sometimes they needed money for the theatre, for the shows on Sunday. So I'd buy it, but I had a scale that I had also got from the junk; and I would buy their junk, of course, with interest.

**Dr. Tom Rivera:** So you were the metal person...

(Laughter)

**Dr. Garcia:** So I would buy junk, and then when the junk man came around, I usually had quite a bit... So I had money in those days. One day it was a big disappointment; we'd go to church on a special service on Friday night, I don't know why, but I went to church, and of course I mentioned Methodist way back [with] my folks when they got to Colton – [they] started attending the Colton Baptist Church right at 'L' Street... So we'd go to church there, and one Friday we went and [the] next day the junkman was

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suppose to come by and I went in the back to check out all my stuff and somebody had stolen it. All my junk was gone, and I was really disappointed with God – man was I disappointed. [I said,] you-know, there I was at your place and you allow this to happen to me.

(Laughter)

**Dr. Tom Rivera:** You mentioned the other dump, Ernie, and that was also in that area, but at the end of ‘O’ Street, and that used to be the dump for the City of Colton...

**Dr. Garcia:** And they burned everything, also.

**Dr. Tom Rivera:** Yeah, and before they set anything on fire, you-know, we’d see the big trucks coming and we’d give that yell in the neighborhood: (inaudible)... *en el dompe*. And then we’d run over there...

**Dr. Garcia:** ...When you think about: *basura nueva*; new garbage; *basura nueva, viva en la basura nueva*... And so we’d go out there and get the bottles 2 cents deposit, remember? And Lindy’s taco sauce on ‘M’ Street across from the Carrera’s house – they had a tiny little restaurant there and they also cooked their salsa; and if you brought the bottle they’d give you penny for each one of the bottles. So that was good income. Ten of those and you got admission to the movies.

**Dr. Tom Rivera:** Yeah, yeah, yeah. But that was... for us, you-know, comic books that they would throw away, that we would collect. The rags that we would collect and sell to the junkman.

**Dr. Garcia:** Cotton rags were big in those days. The other thing about that dump was that if you went beyond it over to the sand of the Lytle Creek, that’s where the packing house dumped the oranges that weren’t good enough for [the] market. And if the oranges had just a little nick or if they had grown up against a branch and had a little

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dent, they wouldn't wrap them. The women at the packing house there by the old depot wouldn't pack them because they weren't market ready, or whatever.

**Dr. Tom Rivera:** And the old depot was located on 'J' and...

**Dr. Garcia:** ...It was 9<sup>th</sup>, yeah, 9<sup>th</sup> and 'J'. And Mr. Aranda had the contract with the packing house to dump all the oranges that had to be gotten rid of. Well, as soon as we knew Aranda had his little model A truck going right on 'O' Street toward the dump, we started running because we'd take a gunny-sack and fill it up with oranges that were perfectly good. So we had orange juice all the time at my house, and probably yours, too.

**Dr. Tom Rivera:** Yes, yes, yes, yes. Yeah, that was good.

Ernie, you graduated from Colton High School, and then you went on to Valley College, and then you graduated from UCR (University of California, Riverside), but did you finish UCR? Or did you have to go in the service?

**Dr. Garcia:** No, I joined the Air National Guard in 1948, as did Gil, my friend Gil. So, I got my AA (Associate Arts) degree from Valley 1950. I applied to the University of Redlands because that was the only place around here to go. I mean there were no other places that close – there's the Claremont schools but... So I applied at Redlands and I had saved enough money even from my junk days to... go to Redlands. And [I] had enough for one year tuition in Redlands, if I lived at home. So I applied, and I still have my card from Dr. Armancost, the president of the University of Redlands, asking me [and] all the new students to a reception at [his] home... the first week in September. And I was really excited to go meet the president – my gosh! At the end of that week, I was still in the Air National Guard, understand, [as a] weekend warrior going the weekends for training. I got a letter from the government saying that the Air National Guard unit 196 Fighter Squadron at Norton Air Force—or not Norton at that time because it was in 1950... it hadn't been named Norton yet. [It was from] San Bernardino Air Depot [and the letter read:] You are advised to... I don't remember the



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wording... windup or something along those lines – your civilian affairs... and you're to report for federalization into the United States Air Force on September 10<sup>th</sup> – just a few days before. So all of a sudden I had to go to Redlands and tell them... I'm not gonna be a junior here, I'm headed for the far-east. Anyway, that was 1950 [and] I already had two years in the Air National Guard which was part of the Air Force but it was California Air National Guard. So I had two more years to complete my four years and I spent those in preparation and actually going to Japan with the air fighter squadron. When I came back I had two years of college, [I was a] graduate from Valley, [and] Dottie, my wife, had also gone to Valley College 1 year behind me. And in those days the emergency credential was being utilized by many of the small school districts, particularly, in the outlying areas. If you took 12 units of 2 Summer sessions at Redlands University in the Summer to learn the basic, very basic, instructional strategies – then you could go teach in an emergency credential. So I did that for 2 years; in the meantime, [I was] taking extension courses from UCLA (University of California, Los Angeles), and so on.

When UCR opened in 1954, which is 2 years after I had been discharged from the service, then I went to UCR. UCR, however, did not start in September but started in February. And so I couldn't go then – I was still teaching the second semester. So I went in February, and all I needed was just less than one year, but I spent a year there with my friend Chuck Young who was also in the service of being Chancellor of UCLA later. So it was an interesting combination; so I got my 12 weeks at Redlands in addition to my correspondence courses in the Air Force, and my two years at Valley [for] my AA degree, and then I finished my BA with a major area in psychology at UCR. After UCR I had taken some courses at Redlands in school organization, administration, and so on. So when I went back to teach, which was in the Barstow School District, when I went back to teach I found out that, now, I was a vice-principal. Two years and I was a vice-principal of an afternoon faculty, [which was a] doubled situation where there was a morning faculty and an afternoon faculty because of the impact of students. Years later, of course, I started my doctoral over at Claremont's Graduate School. But in one of the summers during that time I was able to work for the State Department of Education in several sites in California in second language

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teaching. And through that connection, one group was teaching science in the elementary school, another in math in the elementary school in second language, which was the National Defense Act of 1958. Through that connection, when I went back to teach—to work in Rialto, I got a call asking me if I wanted to apply to work in education research and development at System Development Corporation, which was spun off from Rand. I didn't expect that, but all of a sudden they made it possible [for me] to take off and finish my doctoral work at UCLA. If you remember UCLA in those days because you were a little bit later than I, but in those days there was a prejudice against education in faculty senates in universities, particularly, University of California. They would not award the Ph.D. at UCLA, nor any other of the UC campuses until the '80s when they changed. But it was not considered a discipline until... you might remember that chancellor or the president of the University of California in the '80s had an Ed.D from a university that had the same prejudice on the east coast. And so in the '80s at the University of California [they] then awarded... you could get a Ph.D. at UCLA when I was there in 1961...

**Dr. Tom Rivera:** If you took a language...

**Dr. Garcia:** ...No, if you took a major—not a major but a concentration, let's say you took a concentration in psychology or sociology – we took another semester, then, they might consider you if the faculty at that school agreed that it was legitimate. And there was that prejudice there, and in some cases it's still there...

**Dr. Tom Rivera:** It's still there...

You got your doctorate degree from UCLA when?

**Dr. Garcia:** 1966. You-know, when you've completed all your course work and then you gotta do your dissertation and you mess around and – maybe you didn't but I did. I was a principal at school at that time, and I was not too diligent. Procrastination was my best quality.

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**Dr. Tom Rivera:** No, Ernie, you were busy...

**Dr. Garcia:** Well, but anyway, it took me a while; I completed my work in '63 and 3 years later I finally finished. And my interest in prolonging it, somewhat, was because at that time the University of California, Los Angeles, UCLA, had instituted a new major for doctoral candidates, and that was instructional technology. And it was in its infancy, and so I was a pioneer of 8 students in getting a doctorate in instructional technology, when the computer we were using was the size of this room; and had probably a thousandth of the power in my laptop. It was a time [when] we were into instructional technology and use of computers and... we didn't have the tools at all. However, when I look back at the literature and my papers and everything, the principles that are being used today, many of them still relate because now the capacity is there.

**Dr. Tom Rivera:** And then you spent 13 years in public schools, and another 23 years in higher education. What was the biggest... because I know you participated in many activities, Ernie; you got lots of recognition, lots of honors, and lots of consulting requests. What was the best or one of the highlights during that period?

**Dr. Garcia:** Absolutely, the highlight was my appointment to the advisory committee to the Commission and Civil Rights in Washington – to the Mexican-American study. If you Google it, you can still... download the hardcopies, it's still there. It was a breakthrough in Mexican-American education. In those times, of course, it was the southwestern states, with concentrations in Kansas, Chicago, and other places. But nothing like it is today where the voting power is there now, too. It dealt with some fiscal support for schools that had a predominant Mexican-American population. The availability of counseling and how it was handled to help students who obviously could benefit from it. One of the biggest and best features of the whole study was one of verbal interaction analysis. It was a technique that came really [into] use, particularly, in universities [within] teacher education in the '60s. And it was a system of codifying the verbal interaction in a classroom; and each one had a number;

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and each time that an interaction occurred between a teacher and a student, or students and students, [or] whatever, you quoted a number every three seconds. If you did that over a period of 10 minutes, you begin to get a very, very good idea of how verbal interaction in the classroom occurred.

Was a teacher using all of the time to talk at the students? How did the student and teacher interact? And how did the teacher deal with a time-worn ridiculous approach in teaching? Who can tell me? Can you tell me tell me about this? The teacher says, you're sitting there and you don't have the slightest idea what to tell her because you don't know [what to] tell, right? The teacher would then say, well, you're not listening – you'd better pay closer attention. Okay, right then and there it's a negative and you would code that with a teacher reaction. Or the teacher might say, would you tell him? And it would be a student who was probably an Anglo student. Or, the champion of the class [would] tell you because, after all, somebody's gotta tell you. And that was sort of a put down.

And the picture [that] came out [of] the schools that we particularly studied in Beeville, Texas, in El Paso... I don't remember all of them, but you can find them if you Google the study – gave a dismal picture, a real dismal picture of how teachers interacted with Latino kids.

Arcinega, from Bakersfield, he was the dean of education at San Diego, and then he was president of Bakersfield. He and I reported the findings throughout the southwest in 1973; it was a 5 year study.

So for me it really made sense; in Beeville there were 7 of us all with doctorates, and the people in Beeville... had never seen a person with the name like: Hernandez, or Garcia, or Gomez, or Arcinega, other than their pickers or their field workers. So when we got there, I was a good cop – I was assigned the good cop [role].

**Dr. Tom Rivera:** Why were you a good cop?

**Dr. Garcia:** Because – [remember the] good cop/bad cop... you've heard of that concept, right? Somebody gives the bad news and gets at people, and then you become the ameliorator and they begin to trust you more and more. And when we

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gave the report on Beeville, and I had gone through the 3 schools there, the Mexican school was across the street from the non-Mexican school, and it was terrible conditions. The books and everything were terrible. And so when we made the report, the [introduction] came out like this: Well, they don't care much for education, their families don't care, they don't care; they don't support their kids in education. They're bilingual... So isn't that an advantage? [And they said] all these negative things. Test scores were like this (he puts one hand above the other horizontally – he indicates the Mexican kids are below the Anglo kids)... In the meantime, these kids are dropping out all over the place... and even into high school there's still this big division. And I wanted an explanation for it, and they gave me all these reasons [such as] people don't care, and so forth. So my analysis was: Have you just stopped for a minute to consider you might have lousy schools?

(Laughter)

**Dr. Garcia:** So that was the kind of interaction that we had with [the different schools]. I was not the on-site researcher, I was on advisory committee that over-saw the group... [and] the recent death of Cecelia Arcinega from Stanford, she was one of the people in the group too.

**Dr. Tom Rivera:** What year was this Ernie?

**Dr. Garcia:** '68 to '73.

**Dr. Tom Rivera:** Ernie, you met Dorothy at Colton High School, your wife Dorothy, and how many children?

**Dr. Garcia:** 3, 3 men.

**Dr. Tom Rivera:** And you've been married how many years?

**Dr. Garcia:** This August it will be 62...

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**Dr. Tom Rivera:** Congratulations...

**Dr. Garcia:** Well, I don't know if its congratulations or condolences...

(Laughter)

**Dr. Tom Rivera:** And 3 boys, and what are their names?

**Dr. Garcia:** Our eldest is Steve.

**Dr. Tom Rivera:** And he works at the University of Redlands?

**Dr. Garcia:** Yes, he is a director of IT at the University of Redlands. Our middle son is Tim, and he is a general contractor. Our youngest son, Pat, is a dentist in Highland, and he's a proud graduate of the UCLA Dental School.

**Dr. Tom Rivera:** Was he a graduate of Cal State also?

**Dr. Garcia:** Interesting. He started his work, his schooling in La Sierra University because he thought he might go to Loma Linda, so [he] got his BA from La Sierra, you-know, [so his] chances of getting into dental school were pretty good. Well, he only spent 1 semester there because he complained. He said, all the girls disappear at 5 o'clock on Friday.

(Laughter)

**Dr. Garcia:** And so, he came here (to CSUSB) and was very successful; he majored in organic chemistry. [He] did very well... [And] at the end of his junior year here at Cal State he was eligible to take the DAT (Dental Admission Test). And he took it and he scored very, very high – so he did not have a senior year. Of course, his brothers and the other members of the family all gave him a hard time. [They said,] you're a dentist and you didn't even have a BA... At one time the dean here in Natural Sciences said, come on over and take a few of these things – we'd like to recognize you because you're a successful product of our school. Incidentally, one of the things that did

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happen here, he scored very high, I think it was right along the top in all the things on the DAT. So he came over here to talk to some of his professors after he had been admitted to all of the dental schools in California and 1 in Colorado, except USC, because I told him, if you apply at USC and you get admitted, you're on your own. I'm not gonna pay for any Trojans.

(Laughter)

**Dr. Garcia:** And so, USC was scratched from the [list]. He was admitted at Berkeley, which is the San Francisco dental school, and also at UCLA. But he came over to talk to his professors to tell them he had been admitted to all the schools that he had applied to. And one of the professors said to him: "Well, I'll bet your name didn't hurt you much." So, Pat reaches in his pocket and pulls out (he pulls out his test scores) [and says,] "neither did this!" Straight, top scores in the exam, he said: "Neither did this!" But you see, that prejudice is still there. You were admitted because your name is Garcia.

**Dr. Tom Rivera:** Right, right. Now, Ernie, my last question. You're in the process of a project, you're writing a book; can you tell us about your work in putting that book together?

**Dr. Garcia:** I hate to tell you when this started, but it was a long time ago. And again, procrastination... My manuscript, which was not all in the hard drive, burned in the 2003 fire, where my library was wiped out. Incidentally, at that time I had the whole collection of the development of bilingual education; and, not only that, but foreign language in the elementary school, which was *tres* from 1958, I had everything boxed up and listed to donate to the library. And of course, it all went up in flames... How did I get off on that—you asked me a question?

**Dr. Tom Rivera:** Your book.

**Dr. Garcia:** Oh. I started writing it a long time ago... what it was intended to be, it was just vignettes of life in South Colton. Of all the things that happened there, for example:

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I'll just tell you about one of them because there's a lot of them. You-know, 2 pages of things that happened.

Maundy Thursday is the Holy Thursday before Good Friday; and of course, that's in most Protestant churches... If there's a cross in the front of the chapel, or whatever, it's draped in black and everything is somber... you-know, cause here's this character, Judas, who has just done a number... and I just was always so impressed. Which [is] what happened at the Catholic church across [or] a block down the street – because Father Valencia would have that effigy of Judas hoisted up between the roof of the church and the building across the street. And they would have a band playing, '*Tú ya no soplas como mujer*', and the band was playing like crazy – and here's Judas up there—and they'd light the firecrackers and blow Judas to smithereens. And I said, man! That's what I like! You-know, what am I doing over here with this somber... So, that was one of the stories in [my collection of vignettes].

Others had to [deal] with the junk, and Raul Gomez and I [would be] going off to pick all kinds of things. Raul was closer to my age than...

**Dr. Tom Rivera:** Tony?

**Dr. Garcia:** Tony was the oldest male and then, Gabby.

Anyway, that was the last, right?

**Dr. Tom Rivera:** Where are you on that book?

**Dr. Garcia:** Oh... I contacted some publishers last month to see... You-know, I'm a novice, and the last book that I co-authored was in 1970, [and it] went out of print in 1970, and that was Mexican-American heritage that dealt just with that: *la pisca, las minas, y el traque*. It was used in most junior high schools in those days. So that was handled... the publisher just took all the manuscripts and they produced the book. And I don't know how I have a lot of pictures that are going to be in this book. Some of them [are] very old; some from 1914. Of course, the one from 1938 with Sonny, Dave,



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and I posing for [the] baseball picture that's in the book that Cesar is published. So, it's coming along – I would hope that it would be out by Spring.

**Dr. Tom Rivera:** Okay, good.

**Dr. Garcia:** It covers just a lot of topics, but it's kind of funny.

**Dr. Tom Rivera:** We need a copy of that for our South Colton collection here in this library (CSUSB's Pfau Library).

**Dr. Garcia:** Well sure, that will happen I'm sure.

You-know, I had mentioned to you that the stresses and strains in the '30s in South Colton [were] because really the recency of the revolution and the people who came in the '20s and into the '30s, and the whole thing with Pancho Villa and his anger at the church and his prosecution of priests, and all that. And there was a concomitant feeling of anybody who became a Protestant. And the Catholic hierarchy was very, very strong like today; you look around and you have all these Evangelical churches popping up here and here... and even the mainstream Methodist, Presbyterian, [and] congregational Baptist – they're down in membership, as opposed to off-shoots of a lot of other things. So it's very different today; but in those days... (inaudible).

We've been to the movies, my buddies and I: Ray Gonzalez, Ray Carreon, myself [and] a couple of other guys – we've been to the movies and we saw the Crusaders. Wow! We were really impressed with King Richard with a crown and a tunic. And the tunic was white with a big red cross... and wow! That was great. And they went off to this place called the Holy Land with these guys with the crooked swords, who had a God named Allah, and we had ours named 'God' – and all this stuff like this. So if you ever notice when you go by the old Baptist church there in South Colton, it has a battlement (he uses his hands to draw the shape of the castle walls and how the soldiers used bows and arrows to shoot from between the columns...) You-know like you used in the castle to shoot somebody. That was the architecture of the '20s and '30s in churches, Protestant churches.

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[Anyway,] we'd been to the movies, and man! Ray looked up there and he said, you-know, that looks like the castle that the guys—the crusaders were trying to take away from the Saracens, or whatever those guys were named. Why don't we save it for the Christians? And so we got sacks... You-know, in those days the cement [from the cement] plant came in linen; listen-to-this, linen sacks – printed 'Colton Portland Cement' (CalPortland Cement Company). My Mom collected them and put them in the tina, in the backyard in the big tub, and boiled the letters out of it. So I had linen suits, she would make linen suits out of the [linen fabric.] But if you turn them around [or you could] turn them inside out too without boiling them, and you make holes for the arms and for the neck, you had a tunic. [And with] some red paint you [could draw] a cross... So the swords [were] a little tougher to [make]; but in our garage we made the wooden swords, and we were gonna conquer those guys who were gonna attack the castle. And it was a Saturday so they probably wouldn't be there anyway. So anyway the story goes on – there's a little bit of humor in it.

(Laughter)

**Dr. Garcia:** So we borrow a ladder from Ray's father who had mended it. He'd gotten it from one of the contractors from *la bolucha* (inaudible)... But he had fixed it, and so it was only about a block away; so we dragged the ladder over and put it on the side of the church that was away from too much traffic. And we climbed up there with our swords and our tunics and a couple of things that looked like crowns... King Richard  
(Laughter)

**Dr. Garcia:** So we started climbing up to the battlement on top of the church to take care of these guys. And all of sudden we looked and the ladder was gone. And here's a preacher... [He said,] *bájense!* Get down! So we got down. [He said,] *Que estan haciendo?* What are you doing? And so, Ray explained: Hey, we're crusaders and we're defending... And the preacher looked at us and he said: *Mensos! eran Catolicos como esos.* We didn't know about Martin Luther.

So anyway, we protested; we said, what about Robin Hood? And we named all the characters that we'd seen in the... [The preacher said,] *todos catolicos!* Ray asked: What about King Arthur and the roundtable? [The preacher replied:] *Catolicos.* So we were shot down right there by this prejudice pastor who obviously didn't want us

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defending *Catolicos* who had gone on the Crusades, or before like King Arthur. So there went our heroes. And so, finally one of the guys asked, did any hallelujahs ever fight? And he said, *sí, despues en Martin Lutero*

(Laughter)

**Dr. Garcia:** But those were the funny things that occurred. Hell... I didn't want to go to my church when Judas was being burned over there, and they were playing '*Tu ya no soplas como mujer*'. That was much better –

(Laughter)

**Dr. Tom Rivera:** Ernie, is there anything else that you would like to tell us about that you can remember growing up in South Colton? Who were you heroes in South Colton? Or did you have any heroes in South Colton? I know I did. You were one of my mentors, one of my heroes, and you've been my mentor for 56 years now.

**Dr. Garcia:** And you were sorry after that, weren't you?

(Laughter)

**Dr. Garcia:** Ray Abril, Sr., by far, by far with not even anybody else close. I would say that probably Ray, Sr. influenced me more in so many ways than my father had time to do so. He really was – from the time I was – well, Ray was 6 and I was 8-9; and we had the old burned out school, *escuela quemada*, right next to our house. And we had all kinds of recreation activities: sword fights and everything. And then, as soon as Ray would get home from PFE, they got out at 3 o'clock, and as soon as he'd get home, at 3:30 or so, he'd come out and we'd have a ball game, or we'd have a football game, or he had weights made out of cans filled with concrete, and we lifted there. He was very, very instrumental in the softball teams that he organized when I was 13, 14. We went around and played Meadowbrook and Bloomington, and all that...

And one of the pastors at the church was very influential also because of his social awareness and the needs of people, and much more giving than the one I mentioned just a while ago. He knew how to bake cornbread – I don't where he learned; he was from Los Angeles, had a wife, no kids. And during the depression, people would go get food from the food bank on 'J' Street, and they got beans, rice – [that was the main

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food items]. [They gave away] shirts, WPA shirts were all striped [with] red, white, and blue with all kinds of designs, kids would get those.

Mexicans in South Colton didn't know what to do with cornmeal. You can't make tamales [but] you can make tortillas out of it. So sometimes people wouldn't take it, or they would bring it home and sometimes it would be put out in the alley. If it was put out in the alley [I would] always collect it because I had a chicken business, too.

**Dr. Tom Rivera:** I was gonna say chickens...

**Dr. Garcia:** Yeah, I had a chicken business and that's what they ate... One lady had 2 – 5 pound bags of cornmeal one time and I got it and she gave it to me and she said: What do you do with it? *Que haces con ese?* [I said,] oh... a lady in Bloomington who knows how to do a lot of things so I take it to her – that was a big lie, you-know, I fed it to my chickens.

Anyway, this minister, pastor at this Baptist church there in South Colton knew how to bake cornbread. And he knew how to take powdered milk – that they also gave [away], which people didn't know what to do with, you-know, it didn't taste really good. But he would fix that milk and add just a little bit of cinnamon or vanilla, and of course, it tasted real good... and he'd [place it on top of the box filled with ice] because [there wasn't a refrigerator in the church]. But he'd bake cornbread and the whole area around there—you could smell the cornbread, and that brought a lot of the kids over to do wood-working, and all kinds of things there. But he was one of my heroes because he settled my stomach.

**Dr. Tom Rivera:** Ernie, thank you very much for this interview this morning. I thoroughly enjoyed [this], and what-can-I-say, you've been my mentor for 57-58 years now, and I am delighted you're here with us this morning – and thank you so much.

**Dr. Garcia:** Thank you, Tom, thank you; and I enjoyed it. Although I'm a little disjointed because I tend to go off on things... but in those early years you probably would've thought this is not a mentor this is a nagging son-of-a-gun...

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(Laughter)

Transcribed by Pat Ricé-Daniels, Library Services Specialist-1, Special Collections